Refugee Integration in Scotland
Public Attitude Research
Survation

September 2020

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Methodology

In March 2019 and June 2020, Scottish Refugee Council commissioned Survation to carry out research among people living in Scotland about their attitudes towards refugees in Scotland. In May 2020, a qualitative research phase was also added to further understand and explore public attitudes in Scotland. The research was designed to explore the key question: what are Scottish people’s attitudes towards refugees, and specifically to provide analysis around current framing and campaigning in the media and how the public respond to this. Public attitudes towards refugees and the impact of the media on people's understanding and perception of refugees are seen as factors impacting on refugees’ integration (New Scots Strategy 2018-2022).

Quantitative Research
Survation conducted a survey of public attitudes to refugees on behalf of Scottish Refugee Council between 1st and 4th March 2019 and again between 9th and 15th June 2020. The surveys were conducted among all residents aged 18+ living in Scotland and over 1000 participants took part in both surveys. The surveys were conducted via online panel. Invitations to complete surveys were sent out to members of the panel. Differential response rates from different demographic groups were taken into account. The data were weighted to the profile of all Scottish adults aged 18+. Data were weighted by age, sex, region, 2019 General Election vote (2017 General Election vote for the 2019 wave), 2016 Holyrood Election vote, 2016 EU referendum vote and 2014 independence referendum vote. In order to match the profile of the overall population of Scotland, targets for the weighted data were derived from Office for National Statistics data and the results of the aforementioned elections.

Qualitative Research
On 19th and 20th May 2020, Survation conducted two online (text based) focus groups of 120 minutes among people in Scotland, with a mix of those who live in Glasgow, and urban and rural locations. The groups were split by age i.e. 18 to 34 years and 35+ years. Both groups had a mix of gender, political allegiances, media consumption and Socio-economic Groups (split BC1/C2D). The groups had a mix of attitudes about refugees i.e. “Scotland should welcome more refugees” to “Scotland should welcome less refugees”.

Key findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Research
This section will focus on three core topics of this research i.e. public attitudes, social connections and media. Where possible, we have integrated findings of both qualitative and quantitative phases. The last section will focus on learnings from the focus groups on framing media messages.
Section 1
Social connections
In 2020, fewer people claim to have mixed with someone from a refugee background compared to 2019; this is perhaps expected because of the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that people did not have many opportunities to meet people other than those living in their household. However, while comparing the proportion of people who have mixed with someone from a refugee background in the last 12 months, we see similar proportions in both 2019 and 2020.

When asked about services or community groups that support refugees in local areas, only one in seven participants was aware of such groups. Interestingly, more younger people aged 18 to 24 claimed to be aware of services or community groups that support refugees in local areas.

Our qualitative research delved into how people described community engagement in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many participants focused on how communities have come together to support vulnerable people, but most did not spontaneously mention refugees specifically. One participant in urban Glasgow did mention refugees as being part of the community and a part of community life during the pandemic.

“We have a lot of refugees in our community who are now a big part of our community” and “Refugees have been in our community for a while now they are our neighbours, our children go to school with their children who are their friends. I haven’t seen any changes in people’s attitudes during this pandemic.”

35+ years

This participant’s experiences aside, the quantitative research reinforced findings from the focus groups that while most people in Scotland are not hostile to refugees, they tend to be outside of their immediate community with a lack of visibility and connection. Only about one in eight know or have a contact with someone who is a refugee. This proportion has remained constant since 2019. Residents of Glasgow (28% in 2019 and 19% in 2020) are more likely to have interacted with someone who is a refugee than in other parts of Scotland.

“In all honesty I don’t know a whole lot about them in my community but would be interested to learn”

18-34 years

In 2020, fewer people claim to have mixed with someone from a refugee background compared to 2019; this is perhaps expected because of the lockdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which meant that people did not have many opportunities to meet people other than those living in their household. However, while comparing the proportion of people who have mixed with someone from a refugee background in the last 12 months, we see similar proportions in both 2019 and 2020.

When asked about services or community groups that support refugees in local areas, only one in seven participants was aware of such groups. Interestingly, more younger people aged 18 to 24 claimed to be aware of services or community groups that support refugees in local areas.
Section 2
Understanding public attitudes towards refugees
Further in 2020, a higher proportion of Scottish people empathise with refugees, with 4 in 5 claiming that they have at least some understanding of the issues that affect refugees in Scotland.

About half of the participants (49% in 2019, 53% in 2020) said that they would like to know more about issues that refugees face in Scotland. Encouragingly, the interest to know more about the issues is higher among the younger cohort of 18 to 34 years (58% in 2019, 65% in 2020).

On the other hand, about a third of participants said that they do not want to know more about issues that face refugees in Scotland; a sentiment is shared more by 45 to 64 years old.

When asked the role refugees can play in the local community, 3 in 4 participants said that refugees can contribute to the local community. This perception has improved significantly since 2019 – perhaps owing to the sense of community that people seem to be embracing during the pandemic, which was touched upon in the focus groups.
In qualitative focus groups, participants used a positive emotional language around acceptance, and genuine inclusion while talking about welcoming refugees to Scotland.

"Feels nice to be able to welcome someone as part of the community that way instead of forever being labelled as an outsider"

18-34 years

“A person welcomed into the country for the rest of their lives. They might not have always been Scottish, but that doesn’t make them not Scottish.”

18-34 years

On asking participants how well they think Scotland has supported refugees, two thirds felt Scotland has done a good job supporting refugees – an improvement of 7% versus 2019.

In qualitative focus groups, participants used a positive emotional language around acceptance, and genuine inclusion while talking about welcoming refugees to Scotland.

“Feels nice to be able to welcome someone as part of the community that way instead of forever being labelled as an outsider”

18-34 years

Further, about 55% agree that people from a refugee background help Scotland to be a more vibrant place to live, which is a significant improvement in perception versus 2019 (44%). There is a high degree of agreement with this attitude among 18 to 34 years old cohort (53% in 2019, 67% in 2020).

“COVID is an ideal opportunity to show how ‘new Scots’ have contributed to society (and suffered too).”

35+ years

On the topic of welcoming refugees in Scotland there is polarisation, with one in five participants mentioning that Scotland should welcome more refugees while a similar proportion feel that Scotland should welcome less refugees. About 45% said that Scotland should welcome the same number of refugees as it does now. These attitudes have largely maintained since 2019.
However, 15% feel that more can be done to make refugees feel supported in Scotland. These perceptions were similar across all age groups and both genders.

Next, we asked participants about their perception about how the Scottish government has supported refugees. Participants perceive that the support provided by the Scottish government largely mirrors that of Scotland as a whole.

In 2020, about 65% felt that Scottish government has done a good job supporting refugees, which is a significant improvement versus 2019 (57%). One in five did not have any opinion about how the Scottish government or Scotland as a whole have played a role in supporting refugees.

Finally, participants were provided a list of organisations and initiatives working with refugees and were asked if they were aware of these organisations or initiatives. About three in five are not aware of any organisation or initiative working with refugees. Scottish Refugee Council is the most salient organisation followed by UNHCR.

Awareness of Scottish Refugee Council is higher in Lothian (36% in 2020), South Scotland (33% in 2020) and Glasgow (30% in 2020).
Media: Source of information about refugees
News is primarily where the Scottish public gets its information about refugees, whether via television, press or online news site. While these continue to be the main sources of information across both 2019 and 2020, there has been a significant increase in the usage of social media in 2020 to gather information about refugees; more so among 18 to 44 years old (29% in 2019 and 36% in 2020). Furthermore, the usage of online news sites is also higher among this cohort (38% in 2019 and 42% in 2020).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q7. Where do you get your information about refugees?</th>
<th>Wave 2019 (n = 1000)</th>
<th>Wave 2020 (n = 1018)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TV news (e.g. BBC News Sky News, STV News)</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online News site*</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media (e.g. Facebook/Twitter)</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio news programmes</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through family or friends</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charity Websites</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other websites</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YouTube</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another source</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not get information about refugees</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* (e.g. BBC News/ Huffington Post/ The Guardian/ Mail Online)
Section 4
Framing media messages
Following on from the 2019 quantitative research conducted by Survation, Scottish Refugee Council commissioned qualitative research to explore public attitudes in Scotland towards refugees, and specifically to provide analysis around current message framing and campaigning in the media and how the public respond to this.

Four different narratives frames on refugees in Scotland were explored with the focus groups:

• Frame 1: It’s nothing new (normalisation, positive)
• Frame 2: Ordinary people, extraordinary situations (social norms, empathy)
• Frame 3: Social Justice (fairness, justice)
• Frame 4: Welcoming country (national pride)

The next section details participants’ feedback on individual message frames. Frames 1 and 4 are similar and speak to truths about national values of diversity and inclusion.

Frame 1: It’s nothing new (normalisation, positive)

Message: People have come to Scotland and left Scotland for decades. We take pride in welcoming new Scots to Scottish life. The mix of people in Scotland have made it what it is today. It enriches life in Scotland when we celebrate diversity.

This frame taps into a belief that people across Scotland hold true – national characteristic of friendliness and pride in inclusivity. There is a broad agreement with this frame, irrespective of political persuasion, age or other demographics.

“I think it applies to anyone entering our country and takes the focus away from refugees even though they would be part of it.”
18-34 years

“I would agree that Scotland is a very friendly and welcoming country, but I think it negates the hardships that some face.”
18-34 years

However, this framing does not challenge or relate specifically to refugees. None of the focus group participants wanted to be seen to refute this statement, but there is a sense that this framing may not challenge audiences to think differently about their society and the people within it. It can suggest that nothing needs to change – particularly for the older audience. There is an opportunity to make sure this positive and unifying type of frame is made relevant to refugees.

Frame 4: Welcoming Country (national pride)

Message: Scotland is famous for being a friendly and welcoming country. It is important to welcome new people and to make them feel at home and accepted here. It is important the “new Scots” feel welcomed to make Scotland their home.

This frame demonstrates that the idea of a welcoming country can be taken “too far”, seems superficial and suggestive of sweeping away problems. This frame seems to gloss over hardships and inequality, providing a forced positive view. The use of the term “new Scots” further compounds the point – as in this context it appears like it is avoiding the topic of refugees. The tone is seen as didactic rather than nuanced. This frame lacks a sense of empathy and connection to the unique situation of refugees in Scotland

“I think that it applies to anyone entering our country and takes the focus away from refugees even though they would be part of it.”
18-34 years

“I would agree that Scotland is a very friendly and welcoming country, but I think it negates the hardships that some face.”
18-34 years

Frame 3: Social Justice (fairness, justice)

Message: Many people want to build a fair and equal society in Scotland, protecting the rights of all citizens – no matter who they are or where they started out in life. When we think about building a just society for everyone in Scotland, asylum seekers and refugees are a part of this and we should ensure they are treated fairly.

This frame focuses on a fair and equal society but is less emotionally engaging and less likely to connect with audiences. People often do not think of refugees when thinking more broadly about society in terms of a more just and equal society. When asked which audiences were a focus in a fair and equal society, many referenced the elderly, disabled, homeless or those in poverty. There is no specific mention of characteristics such as race, ethnicity or colour when thinking of a fair and equal society.

There is a need to talk about justice and equality but in a more empathetic way – particularly if it can show the hardships and pain overcome by real people.

Frame 2: Ordinary people, extraordinary situations (social norms, empathy)

Message: Refugees are our friends, neighbours, colleagues. Behind the label “migrant” or “asylum seeker” are ordinary people and ordinary families in extraordinary circumstances. Refugees are survivors with much to contribute. No one wants to be a refugee.

This frame is the most powerful emotionally and most likely to challenge audiences to think about refugees in a heartfelt and positive light. This frame can confront and surprise people, generates empathy and shows resilience and determination of people in extraordinary circumstances. Reminding people that “no one wants to be a refugee” generates empathy.

“It makes me sympathise if anything as their lives have been very difficult and I think this statement emphasises that.”
18-34 years

“I think it conjures up a more accurate ideas of the kinds of lives that refugees are seeking here and why - my experience is that they are often so grateful for the second chance and try hard to integrate.”
18-34 years

However, some question whether these stories are showing the success at the expense of those who have suffered hardship and injustice. Older audiences in particular made reference to the fact that these stories may present a partial picture of life as a refugee in Scotland, which also underpinned a perspective that not all refugees are contributing in this way.

“This had a good focus on the contribution made by the family since coming to Scotland but I was surprised they had less detail on the crisis / trauma they suffered. Perhaps this context was taken for granted in the reader.”
35+ years

“I think it lets us put ourselves on the back and easy consciences... I’d like the success stories balanced with the hellish stories some refugees have to tell about their treatment.”
35+ years
Key learnings from message framing research

1. There is work to be done, most people do not see refugees as members of their society and community – there is a lack of visibility and connection for many people.

2. That said, there is pride in Scotland’s diversity and inclusivity and an unwillingness to disagree with this “truth” about Scottish values.

3. Framing that plays to this positive sense of pride and inclusivity provide a reminder of shared values but don’t necessarily encourage people to reevaluate their thinking about refugees as true members of society.

4. Playing too much on Scotland being welcoming can backfire as it glosses over problems and inequalities and encourages people to feel “everything is alright” when it often is not.

5. Framing around ordinary people, extra ordinary circumstances provides a powerful and challenging perspective.

6. However, many people are not noticing or seeking out such messages and are unlikely to access case studies and stories – the challenge is to get these messages embedded more widely and succinctly (including across social media for younger people).

7. “New Scots” is a positive and welcomed concept – but some tend to focus on “New Scots” “fitting in” and assimilating rather than bringing their own diversity and experience to Scotland.

8. Campaigning messages can highlight a powerful sense of injustice but also can reinforce the sense of separation and for older audiences can highlight a deeper level of mistrust and fears of economic burden, which can underly perceptions of older audiences.

9. Is there potential for a frame that combines the normalization and positivity of “ordinary people” with a sense of social justice? This frame could put human and empathic angle on the injustice and empathy in achieving fairness.

Conclusions from quantitative research

- Only about one in eight people in Scotland know or have had a contact with someone who is a refugee, with residents in Glasgow more likely to have done so.

- Fewer have mixed with people from a refugee background either daily, weekly, or monthly in 2020 than in 2019. This, however, is likely due to restrictions on socialisation as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic – the year-on-year figure has not changed.

- Only around one in seven people in Scotland are aware of services or community groups that support refugees in their local area.

- Around 40% of Scots would be happy to see a refugee family housed in their local area, which is consistent across both waves. 18 to 24 years olds are the most open to the prospect, with the percentage who would be happy having increased from 47% to 60% across waves.

- Four in five Scots in 2020 agree that “refugees are ordinary people just like us” – an increase of around 10% from 2019. A similar proportion claim at least some understanding of the issues that affect refugees in Scotland, and half of respondents say they would like to know more about refugees.

- The percentage of Scots who think that refugees have a role to play in their community has increased significantly between waves, from 40% in 2019 to 73% in 2020. The idea that refugees make Scotland a more vibrant place to live has also increased in popularity, from 44% last year to 55% this year.

- Attitudes towards the number of refugees Scotland should welcome have largely held across waves. A plurality of participants (45%) believe that it should welcome the same number of refugees as it does now, with those who think it should invite more and less on roughly equal footing.

- Two thirds of Scots in 2020 think that the country as a whole has done a good job of supporting refugees – an improvement of 7% since 2019. The same percentage of Scots believe that the Scottish government has done a good job of supporting refugees, an opinion which has had a similar uptick between waves.

- The vast majority of Scots still get their information about refugees from news sources, such as television, press or online news sites. However, there has been a significant increase in the number of Scots who get information about refugees from social media (19% in 2019 to 25% in 2020). This is most common among Scots aged 18 – 44 years old (29% in 2019 and 36% in 2020).

- About three in five Scots are not aware of any organisation or initiative working with refugees. However, Scottish Refugee Council was the most salient organisation among those surveyed, with a quarter of participants saying they had heard of it. This figure was consistent across waves.
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